

FROM THE DESK OF SAL PERALTA

August 21, 2013

**Relating to Primary  
Elections and Minor  
Party Nominating  
Processes**

The Independent Party of Oregon currently has approximately 96,000 members statewide.

Since 2010, the party has conducted 2 primary elections and one congressional special primary election at its own expense via the internet.

Concerns about cost, security, and liability have led our party's officers to conclude that we would benefit from greater involvement/assistance from the state in conducting our primary elections. We believe that any such involvement should be extended to other minor political parties, at their option.

The state and counties currently pay for and administer the cost of primary elections for Democrats and Republicans, including elections that have no discernible public interest, such as Precinct Committee elections. The state also pays for and administers all non-partisan elections. The state has also paid for the cost of sending notices to NAV's informing them of their right to vote in the Republican Primary, at no cost to the Republican Party. The state plays no role in the elections of minor political parties, resulting in most minor political parties nominating by small caucuses or conventions.

Political primaries are a public process that results in the selection of candidates who will ultimately hold public office. There is a state interest in ensuring the integrity of primary election processes; and an obligation to treat political parties and their candidates fairly. While it's true that there is an informal institutionalization of a "two party system" there is no Constitutional or statutory mandate that requires the State to subsidize only two private political parties. And, current technology makes inclusion in the taxpayer funded primary process of all legally established parties who wish to participate economically feasible.

We agree with the Secretary of State's public statements in 2012 that there is a legitimate public interest served in ensuring the maximum possible participation in elections conducted in Oregon. And, as there are almost as many NAV and minor party voters as there are Republican voters, believe that the time is ripe for the State to more fully empower all voters.

The IPO's process, which uses the web to deliver ballots that must be returned with a signature and signed ID, is cumbersome at best. None of our officers would readily tolerate such stringent voter ID requirements in an election financed by the state. Nevertheless, because the party does not have the ability to validate all signatures on ballots cast, we require such an ID, which drives participation down significantly. In 2012, out of all ballots prepared on line, more than 50% were not returned with the required ID. Additionally, participation was diminished significantly because the party is forced to conduct its

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election at an unusual time and date, and in an “unofficial” manner that voters are not accustomed to using.

**Therefore we offer the following requests/recommendations for consideration:**

**Option 1:**

**Allow minor parties to opt-in to a \*\*\*state-run closed\*\*\* primary election.**

**Challenges:**

- Would require modification to “sore loser” law to accommodate fusion voting.
- Would make campaigning much more difficult for candidates seeking to run on multiple party tickets.
- Would require incremental cost increase/potential implementation challenges for county clerks.

**Option 2:**

**Allow minor parties to opt-in to a state-run closed primary election held on the same date as the currently scheduled fall special election.**

**Challenges:**

- Would probably require legislative change to move date of the special election forward to accommodate printing of names of successful minor party primary nominees on the General Election ballots and voters’ pamphlet.
- Would require results of the primary election to be certified as official in a relatively short period of time, also to accommodate printing of General Election ballots.
- Absent a special legislative referral to voters, there are no statewide measures on the ballot during the September special election, only local measures, so minor party primary ballots might need to be mailed to minor party voters who would not otherwise be receiving a ballot. This would lead to an incremental cost increase that the clerks would likely oppose. This could be mitigated by the SOS Elections administering it.

**Option 3:**

**State sends public notice of election; IPO conducts its own election, but state reviews signatures to determine validity.**

**Challenges:**

- Would require budget to mail postcard notices;
- Would require allocation of staffing to count signatures. This could be mitigated by timing IPO election at a time when staff is not allocated to initiative petitions and/or election matters.